

HISTORICAL JOTTINGS

"On Wednesday 29th September 1869 being St. Michael's day, a large number of the Craft assembled at the Free Church Schools, Sittingbourne, Kent at 2 o'clock in the afternoon for the purpose of Consecrating a new Lodge to be known by the name of St. Michael's Lodge No. 1273 in the Register of the Grand Lodge of England" (The start of the first Minutes.)

Well, that's how it all began. I wonder if in those heady days the seven Founders had the inclination to wonder if St. Michael's would ever reach 100 let alone 125. We should, I think, take time to ponder the next 75-100 years. It helps put our present activities as the members of St. Michael's Lodge, into perspective.

Apart from the Minutes, so faithfully kept by succeeding generations of Secretaries over the years, there are other records of events, less detailed perhaps but records none the less. Our Honours Board for example. Unique in its design in my experience, is such a record. Does anyone wonder why Thomas Grabham was recorded as Worshipful Master in both 1869 and 1870? The answer is that upon Consecration he was ill and could not take his Chair. He was however, none the less cited as Master Designate, and W.Bro. Keddell, of Harmony Lodge No.133, Faversham, was asked to take Charge of the Lodge as Presiding Officer until the Master Designate recovered. He recovered sufficiently to be Installed in 1870. Interestingly the Master Designate appointed the Officers. As the first Minutes say "A paper was then given signed by the W.M. Designate, properly attested, requesting the Presiding Officer to appoint the following Officers:-"

Another historical record, of sorts, can be found from the way in which we lay out the dining arrangements. Have you noticed the Secretary and Treasurer always sit at the ends of the top table facing each other? Have you wondered why? Well, before the First World War it was custom for two roast joints to be brought to the tables, to be carved, one each end of the top table, by the Secretary and Treasurer. As the Centenary notes observe, many years have elapsed since joints were carved at the table, but

because of this historical precedent, those same two seats are still reserved for the Secretary and Treasurer. Future dining secretaries please note!

Incidentally, the cooking was done by the Stewards under the supervision of the Tyler. There were in those days two Stewards - the Senior Steward and the Junior Steward.

It is usual at such an Anniversary as this to read from the Minutes of, say, one hundred years ago. I thought, however, it might be more interesting to say something about some of the events occurring about 100 years ago. Subscriptions were raised from 7s.6d. to 10s.0d. per quarter at the November 1889 Meeting of St. Michael's, justified by a reference to vastly superior accomodation - that is this Hall which was built on the site of stables let to the Lodge in 1889 by Bro. Charles Burley, (with the option to purchase at any time - subsequently exercised.) Consecration of this Hall took place in June 1889. A dining room was erected 17th June 1891 (the present Lodge of Instruction room) at a cost of £100, and the Freehold acquired for £600. In August 1891 Charles Burley died, and the Lodge was placed in mourning for three months:- "the mourning to be worn by Brothers individually, three rosettes of black crepe on aprons, and one at the point of the collar, just above the jewel, and Black Gloves."

Not everything was sweetness and light in those days however. October 1889 marks the Installation of Bro. Roots, following his election the preceding month. It takes a more detailed reading of the minutes to establish that he stood for election as W.M. in 1887 and 1888. In 1887, he was beaten by 18 votes to 4 by Bro. Goble. The W.M. then read a prepared statement. "Bound by my obligation as Master Elect under my Mastership not to permit any deviation from the established customs and landmarks of the Order, I desire to place on record that the solicitations of votes by means of a circular by an aspirant to the Master's Chair is in my opinion a deviation from established customs and an undesirable innovation, unmasonic in principle." Bro. Roots had, it seems, been touting for votes! In the

following year, 1888, he had his wrist slapped again - he went down by 14 votes to 2. By 1889 he had been forgiven - he won an uncontested election. Bro. Roots held the Offices of Junior Warden in 1885 and Senior Warden in 1886.

100 years later, it can be said without fear of contradiction that solicitation of votes would still be regarded as a deviation from established customs, an undesirable innovation, unmasonic in principle; an example of the enduring nature of Masonic principles. Long may they continue to endure, and remain the same when St. Michael's Lodge is 225 years old - and beyond.

MEMBERSHIP 1969 - 1994

Over the period membership has declined from 105 in 1969 to 67 in 1994. At first sight this seems a worrying trend, but upon closer examination there are reasons. It had become practice by 1969 to limit Initiations and Raisings to one per Meeting. Doubles, if they occurred at all, were only during Passings. More lately, Passings are limited to one - by preference. This means that at most, given nine meetings per year, and allowing one for Installation, we take in, as Initiates, an average of less than three per year. It was not always so. After the 1939-45 war there were many double, triple and quadruple ceremonies, which will inevitably increase numbers rapidly. A deliberate decision to take only single ceremonies suggests that if ceremonies continue to be limited to one per meeting, and the meetings limited to nine per year, then the optimum number of members will be between 60 - 70.

There are no grounds for concern. Indeed the opposite is true. During the recession which started in 1989 and of which hopefully we are now seeing the end, St. Michael's has had a steady stream of candidates, often waiting two years or more for Initiation: this at a time when a number of Lodges in East Kent have been struggling to find suitable candidates. In the short term, between 1987 and 1994, membership of St. Michael's has in fact increased by six.

SOME ITEMS OF INTEREST TAKEN AT RANDOM FROM

THE LODGE MINUTES. 1969 - 1994.

- 1969 Membership 105
Church Service of Thanksgiving for the Centenary of St. Michael's Lodge 28th September 1969.
Special Centenary Meeting 122 November 1969 at Bowaters Club House. 160 attenders.
Subscriptions £5.
- 1970 Centenary Sherry Party 16th January 1970.
Cost 7s.6d. per guest.
Initiation Fee raised to 32 guineas.
L.O.I. Room re-decorated.
Bicentenary celebrations of Province of Kent.
- 1971 A Reverend Brother on being entrusted before Raising argued with the W.M. about the position of the pillars at the entrance of King Solomon's Temple. The W.M. dealt with the matter by pointing out that the issue depends on whether you are inside looking out or vice-versa.
- 1972 Lodge rent per meeting increased from £12 to £16.
Third Honours Board presented to the Lodge.
- 1973 First indication that the Provincial Grand Lodge of Kent was to be divided into two.
- 1974 First appointments of Library & Museum Representatives.
- 1975 First reference to 1980 R.M.B.1. Festival. Target £4,676.
Lodge rents per meeting increased from £16 to £20.
Subscriptions increased to £8.
Initiation Fee increased to £50.
- 1976 Subscription increased to £10.
Initiation Fee increased to £60.